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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#) [IO](#) [KDEM](#)
SUBJECT: BIELSA PESSIMISTIC ON ECUADORIAN ELECTIONS

Classified By: PolOff Erik Martini for reasons 1.4 (B&D)

¶1. (C) Summary: At Ambassador Jewell's breakfast meeting with major donors and supporters of the election observation effort, OAS Election Observation Mission to Ecuador Chief, Rafael Bielsa, outlined his concerns with upcoming presidential elections. Candidates and the media seem to be planting the idea in the public that fraud is inevitable. While GOE preparation is proceeding well, there are some weaknesses that could fuel fraud speculation. Bielsa has concluded that substantial post-electoral controversy is possible. End Summary.

Background

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Jewell convened a breakfast with international donors and players to discuss OAS election monitoring plans. In attendance were: OAS Chief of Election Observation Mission Rafael Bielsa and selected OAS staff; Ambassadors to Ecuador of Spain and Switzerland; representatives from the Embassies of Canada, Germany, Chile, and the Netherlands; and resident representatives of the UN, World Bank, IMF, and Interamerican Development Bank. In a two hour discussion, participants listened to Bielsa's observations and exchanged views.

Bielsa Outlines His Worries

¶3. (C) Bielsa expressed genuine worry over upcoming Ecuadorian elections on October 15. He did not believe that electoral fraud would be widespread or systematic, but could be just enough to give the losers in a close presidential election grounds for complaint. He believes several candidates and the media are laying the groundwork for electoral challenges similar to what happened in Mexico. For example, Rafael Correa has repeatedly claimed in the press, and during his recent meeting with Bielsa, that the elections will be fraudulent because of MinDef Delgado's ties to Social Christian Party (PSP) leader Leon Febres Cordero. Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE) candidate Fernando Rosero has repeated those claims in the press and also formally complained to Bielsa.

¶4. (C) Although Bielsa believes the GOE election authorities are doing the best job they can with their resources, he said there are potential weaknesses in their preparation that, while not strictly fraud indicators, could be used by a candidate to claim irregularities. Specifically, Bielsa mentioned that delays in the vote count or the transport of

votes from provinces to the capital or slow counting could lead to speculation. In this vein, Bielsa is very troubled that the GOE Attorney General and the GOE Controller have not approved the Supreme Electoral Tribunal's (TSE) contract for quick counting with Brazilian firm E-Vote. The TSE has re-affirmed that it will go forward with the E-Vote contract, without the two agencies' blessing. Further, he believes that a public expression of dissatisfaction with the procurement method or any other aspect of the contract by these two GOE agencies could cast doubt upon the election results. Bielsa also mentioned that the GOE is printing too many ballots.

¶15. (C) Bielsa recommended recruiting more OAS observers to help quell the latent beliefs that fraud will taint the elections. He believes it is too close to the elections to counter the impression of fraud being cultivated by some candidates in the media. He said political parties do not have the resources to monitor all the polling stations. As Ecuador has politicized election machinery, it is vital for all political parties to be able to observe each step of the process in each polling place. When some multilateral organization members asked if they could help supply more observers, Bielsa's deputy, Moises Benamor, welcomed the offer, but said OAS resources were already accounted for.

Bielsa Meets With Candidates

¶16. (C) Bielsa said he met with all the political candidates, except Alvaro Noboa. He characterized the meetings as productive and informative. Talking with Correa was "like talking to someone with six months to live"; in other words, he acts and talks like he has nothing to lose. Bielsa characterized Correa as very intelligent but as someone who tended to trivialize many issues.

Comment

¶17. (C) Conventional wisdom here has been that the elections themselves will go relatively smoothly, while governance after elections will surely be fraught with challenges. Bielsa's views raise the possibility that elections this year will not go as well as they have in the past because of fraud allegations and gaps in GOE election administration. Bielsa did not analyze how a large margin of victory would alter his perceptions. Bielsa's deputy was more upbeat than Bielsa in most of his comments. However, Bielsa's credible scenario of controversial elections raised a red flag with international donors.

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